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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ BORDER SECURITY WORKING GROUP OVERSHADOWED BY
U.S.-SYRIAN TENSIONS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 793
[1](#)B. STATE 123940
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 3710
[1](#)D. DAMASCUS 800

Classified By: Political-Military Minister-Counselor Michael H. Corbin
Reasons: 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The third session of the Iraq Neighbors Border Security Working Group (BSWG) produced little forward motion toward practical measures to improve security on or within Iraq's borders, although its final communiqu  did include some proposed measures that will be helpful if implemented (e.g., a call for states to carry through with earlier plans to assign border security liaison officers to Iraq). Syria, joined by Iran, the Arab League, and the OIC, took the opportunity to condemn the October 26 border incident at Abu Kamal, which they characterized as an act of U.S. aggression. U.S. head of delegation, CDA Connelly, pushed back hard both at the table and in a statement read to international, regional, and local media. The final communiqu  (in which the U.S., as a conference observer, had no hand) included several anti-U.S. references, which Iraqi head of delegation MFA DepMin Labeed Abbawi claimed he had managed to water down. The U.S. was right to attend and to deliver an unambiguous statement of where we place responsibility for tensions on the Syria-Iraq border. The meeting once again failed to deliver practical progress on border cooperation to strengthen Iraqi border security, while keeping hope alive for the future. If some of the recommendations in the final communiqu  are implemented, they offer the promise of substantive action. We will coordinate with the Iraqi MFA to get its views on the process. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The third session of the Iraq Neighbors Border Security Working group (BSWG) kicked off 23 November in Damascus under the shadow of the October 26 Abu Kamal incident, which the Syrians have characterized as an illegal U.S. military raid (ref A). Participants included Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, the Arab League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. P-5 member ambassadors or staff were present as observers (with the French also representing the EU). U.S. Charge Maura Connelly led the U.S. delegation accompanied by Damascus pol counselor, Baghdad deputy pol-mil counselor, and Baghdad DHS attache. The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq, UNAMI, dispatched SRSG Political Advisor Gerard Sambrana to observe.

[1](#)3. (C) In a pre-conference huddle, Iraqi head of delegation MFA DepMin Labeed Abbawi had told the U.S. delegation that his goals for the BSWG were to emphasize Iraq's security gains and to push for regional CT cooperation. Abbawi thought the SARG would not push the October 26 issue. Despite Abbawi's optimism, Syrian Minister of Interior MG

Basam Abdul Majid opened the conference - before a large audience of local, regional, and international media - with a statement in which he condemned the October 26 incident and demanded that said condemnation feature in the final communiqu  of the BSWG. After the media were shoos out, a two-hour opening session ensued in which, Iran, the Arab League, and the OIC all also condemned October 26 as "an act of U.S. aggression, while Syria and Iran criticized the Iraq-U.S. security agreement (aka SOFA) as an infringement upon Iraqi sovereignty. Statements were otherwise unremarkable; on a positive note, the Turkish statement included the news (Ref Q) positive note, the Turkish statement included the news (Ref C) that Iraq, Turkey and the U.S. had agreed to establish a trilateral mechanism to eliminate the PKK terrorist presence in Northern Iraq.

14. (C) As observers were granted the opportunity to make opening statements, CDA Connelly drew on Ref B talking points to make a statement from the floor, including an unambiguous statement that "the Syrian government allows foreign fighter facilitator networks to operate within its borders." SARG DFM Arnous delivered a bland Syrian riposte and adjourned the opening session into a working group comprised of Iraq, its neighbors, and the Arab League to draft a final communiqu . (Note: despite earlier talk that this iteration of the BSWG might include working groups focused on practical measures, no such groups convened. End note.) CDA took this opportunity to deliver her press statement (using text provided Ref B) to the media waiting outside the conference hall.

15. (C) Six hours later the U.S. delegation returned to the
BAGHDAD 00003736 002 OF 004

hall for the final session to find that the participants (who had taken a lengthy lunch break) had not yet agreed on the communiqu  text. On the way in, Iraqi D/FM Abbawi pulled us aside to warn the Syrians and Iranians had pushed for a strong condemnation of the October 26 raid. The Iraqi delegation had "done what it could" to water down the proposed text, he asserted. The statement included recognition of the reduction of tensions and the increase of stability in Iraq and its importance for regional stability. Otherwise, Syria had worked hard to include several references objecting to the use of Iraqi territory for attacks against neighboring countries.

16. (C) The evening session began with an intervention by Abbawi in reply to statements that had criticized the SOFA and Iraq's security situation. In response to those who argued the SOFA was an infringement of Iraq's sovereignty, Abbawi stressed the SOFA reflected 10 months of difficult and complex negotiations with the United States. The resulting agreement had reaffirmed the GOI's sovereignty and had enhanced its security. Iraq had extracted U.S. commitments not to use Iraqi territory for operations against neighboring countries; it had successfully negotiated a U.S. commitment to withdraw from Iraqi cities and population centers by June 2009 and to withdraw completely from Iraq by December 2011. The agreement also allowed for Coalition troops to continue training of Iraqi military and security personnel to ensure their readiness to defend and maintain order in the country. In the final analysis, the security agreement and its accompanying Strategic Framework Agreement would assist Iraqi political, economic, and social development, would create a more stable and secure Iraq. A more stable and secure Iraq was surely in the interest of Iraq's neighbors and the security and stability of the region as a whole.

17. (C) We expected rapid approval of the communiqu , followed by adjournment. Instead, a 50-minute debate ensued due to Turkish and Iranian objections to language condemning attacks from Iraq against neighboring countries (Syrian language, we understand) and against Iraqi

territory by neighboring states (Iraqi language). The final compromise, proposed by the Turkish chief of delegation Deputy Director General for Security Affairs Inan Ozyildiz (while the Iranians hung back) finessed the second issue by focusing on condemnation of attacks by neighboring countries "intended" to infringe on Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity.

18. (C) The final communiqu makes general statements about the importance of strengthening security cooperation and coordination between Iraq and its neighbors and implementing previous commitments to sign a security cooperation MOU and appoint liaison officers (note: to work on practical steps to improve border security. End note). The statement also explicitly rejects the October 26 "raid" and makes other references to not using Iraqi territory (land, sea, or air) for strikes against neighboring countries. The final language also recognizes Syria's contributions to improved security cooperation with Iraq; see para 10.

19. (C) COMMENT: In light of speculation in media and diplomatic circles as to whether the USG would "fear" attending this conference and facing the Syrians' finely honed rhetorical attacks, the U.S. was right to attend and to deliver an unambiguous statement of where we place responsibility for tensions on the Syria-Iraq border. The inability of the Iraqis to prevent the communiqu from slamming the U.S. was a disappointment, but not a surprise in view of Iraqi FM Zebari's effort on an earlier trip to Damascus (Ref D) to distance Iraq from the Abu Kamal raid. The meeting once again failed to deliver practical progress on border cooperation to strengthen Iraqi border security, while keeping hope alive for the future. It would be easy to dismiss the Report and Recommendations as without weight, but if some of these steps - e.g., the call for lagging neighbors to assign liaison officers to Baghdad - are actually implemented, they offer the promise of substantive action. END COMMENT.

110. (SBU) Text of the communiqu (Embassy Damascus translation):

Report and Recommendations
The Third Expanded Meeting of the Security Cooperation and
Coordination of Countries Neighboring Iraq
Damascus 11/23/2008

First: The Security Cooperation and Coordination Committee

BAGHDAD 00003736 003 OF 004

of Countries neighboring Iraq convened in Damascus on 11/23/2008, with the participation of representatives from Iraq's neighboring countries: Egypt, Bahrain, the Arab League, The Organizations of Islamic Conference, the five permanent states in the UNSC, the Group of 8 countries, the United Nations, and the European Union (attached a list of participants).

Second: The meeting was opened with a speech by General Bassam Abdul Majeed, Minister of Interior of the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by a statement by the head of the Iraqi delegation in which he outlined the aspects of developments in the current security situation and the required efforts to support the endeavors seeking to establish security and stability in Iraq, and he presented an action paper presented by the Iraqi delegation.

Third: The conferees stressed the joint concern for enhancing cooperation between Iraq and neighboring countries to enhance security and stability in Iraq; to respect the unity, sovereignty and independence of Iraq; to maintain its Arab Islamic identity and the reflection of this on the security and stability of the region; and on the exchanged commitments between the parties in accordance

to the recommendations of the first and second meetings of the committee, in addition to the agreements of the first and second meetings of the committee, in addition to the agreements and memos of understandings signed between Iraq and neighboring countries.

Fourth: The heads of the delegations dealt in their statements with their assessments of the current security situation in Iraq and its developments, and the status of joint borders between Iraq and neighboring countries. A number of speakers also dealt with the forthcoming national obligations in Iraq which require continued cooperation between Iraq and neighboring countries and require more support for the Iraqi security forces and its institutions. Others presented some of the achievements in the field of cooperation to combat terrorism, and trans-national organized crimes, also combating infiltrations and smuggling, in addition to the current status of the bilateral and multi-lateral agreements and protocols and the progress achieved in implementing the recommendations issued by the previous two meetings of the committee regarding the mechanisms of communication and exchange of information.

Fifth: The delegations pointed, in their statements, to the raid conducted by the American forces inside the Syrian territories in the area of Al-Boukamal, and what it caused in terms of dangerous repercussions with regard to the security and stability of the region, and the Iraqi delegation expressed its rejection of this raid and its concern to overcome the aftermath of this incident and to continue coordination and cooperation between Syria and Iraq.

Six: The UN representative presented some ideas which deal with the future of bi-lateral and multi-lateral cooperation between Iraq and neighboring countries, and some newly proposed mechanisms for such cooperation.

Seventh: In light of the discussions, it has been agreed that the following recommendations would be submitted to the forthcoming expanded meeting of the foreign ministers of neighboring countries, and to inform the meeting of the interior ministers of countries neighboring Iraq, during their forthcoming meeting which will be hosted by the Republic of Arab Egypt in October 2009:
QRepublic of Arab Egypt in October 2009:

Stress on respecting the sovereignty, safety, and unity of Iraq, and that its security and stability is tied to the security and stability of its neighbors, and that the improvements of its security situation would reflect positively on the security and stability of the region.

Praise the marked improvement in the security situation inside Iraq, represented in the decrease of the frequency of terrorist operations and the number of those killed and injured, and to praise, in this regard, the efforts of the Iraqi government and the positive cooperation of the neighboring countries.

The importance of continuing the on-going cooperation between Iraq and neighboring countries, especially in the fields of combating terrorism, trans-national organized crimes, exchange of information, prevention of infiltrations, drying up the financial resources of

BAGHDAD 00003736 004 OF 004

terrorist organizations and to reveal its sources.

Stress the rejection of the use of territories, waters and airspaces of Iraq as a passage or a launching pad for attacks against neighboring countries, and to refrain from any military operations by any neighboring country against Iraq, its sovereignty and regional safety.

Condemnation of all aggressions and terrorist attacks which target Iraq and neighboring countries.

Stress on the non-use of Iraqi territory or any state of the neighboring countries as a passage or a launching pad for any terrorist actions that threaten the security and stability of Iraq or neighboring countries, and the necessity to take steps that would prevent the use of Iraqi territory or any state of neighboring countries for training or committing terrorist acts, and work to enhance cooperation to remove any threat through dialogue and via diplomatic channels, and to stress that the process of controlling borders is a joint responsibility between Iraq and neighboring countries to limit infiltrations and security violations.

Call on neighboring countries which did not yet sign or ratify the security cooperation protocol (Jeddah Protocol of 2006), to complete its national legal procedures in this regard.

Call on the neighboring countries which did not yet sign security memos of understanding, to sign such memos.

Urge Iraq and neighboring countries, which did not yet form bilateral committees to resolve existing problems with Iraq, to do so, and stress the importance of activating the role of the liaison officers of the neighboring countries and call on the states which did not yet name the liaison officers to hasten their naming.

Stress on the recommendations issued by the Committee of Borders experts which convened in Amman on October 21, 2008, in compliance with the recommendations of the second meeting of the Security Cooperation and Coordination Committee, and to be submitted to the forthcoming meeting of the foreign ministers of Iraq's neighboring countries.

Stress on the prevention of instigation of violence and the atoning of others in all formats and means, and the recommendation not to deal with Iraqi elements which call for terrorism, atoning, instigation of sectarianism or undermine the political process in Iraq.

Work to find channels of communication between the support mechanisms established at the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and the Secretariat of Iraq's Neighboring Countries' Interior Ministry which is based in Baghdad.

Acknowledgment of the ideas contained in the statement of the representative of the UN Secretary General to the meeting, and referring it to the concerned parties to review it in order to present it to the next meeting of the committee.

Stress the importance of adherence to the establishment of reconciliation and Iraqi national consensus, and praise the role of the Iraqi government in this regard, and call on the Arab League to continue its efforts in this framework in coordination and cooperation with the Iraqi government and the concerned parties, and to support the efforts undertaken by the Organization of Islamic Conference in this field.

Express thanks and appreciation to the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting this important meeting and for the good reception and the generosity and what it has presented of facilities to ensure the success of the work of this committee, and to praise its intensive efforts and what it Qommittee, and to praise its intensive efforts and what it has shown of cooperation to control the borders with Iraq, which contributed to improving the security and stability of Iraq.